

Bier-bearing “Inferiors” and the “Skin” of the Community in Modern and Contemporary Village Society: Cases from Southern Gyeonggi Province

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(Abstract) In this paper I analyze what bier-bearers did for the village community, mainly based on the fieldwork interviews carried out in southern Gyeonggi area. Focused on the bier-shouldering practice, those interviews illuminate the role of the “inferiors” (*sangnom* 常-, *hain* 下人, and *jungin* 中人) who resided in the social border area of the village community. It was their job to perform the lowly work both in ritual and ordinary practices, so they could not escape from social disdain. I begin this article by tracing how *sachon gye* (四寸契), one of the modern rural organizations for bier-bearing, developed and elucidate its social and cultural meanings, which were consistently under the influence of the *yangban*-commoner relationship. I then extend the analysis to outline a number of incidents in the southern Gyeonggi area. The final section classifies the southern Gyeonggi cases into two sociohistorical groups to discuss the social and cultural meanings of the abolition of the discriminatory bier-shouldering practices and address debates about immunity and the other community.

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1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to shed light on the tasks performed by “inferiors” (*araetgeot*)¹ in modern and contemporary rural villages in support of *yangban*²-led communities, thereby criticizing the practices of defining communities through the things that their official members share or hold to be important (such as rules, values, and assets) and of imagining and representing the nature of social relationships through analogies based on family and kinship. In so doing, I will highlight the ways in which communities are constituted and defined, by way of those who occupy a liminal area that is neither inside nor outside them, and who can neither be called members nor non-members of them.

To this end, I will keep in mind the question of the nature of the modern context in which quasi-caste-based discrimination operates in villages, even after the abolition of the pre-modern caste system (the so-called “*yangban*-commoner relationship”) as part of the Gabo Reform. I believe that when the caste system that constituted the basis of the social order was legally abolished and came to exist only in the form of popular customs, other aspects of the communal order appeared—aspects that had been invisible and taken for granted during the caste system period. Another important reason for my interest in this question is that I judge the legacy of caste system relationships to be of core importance in elucidating unique aspects of contemporary Korean culture.

To this end, this article is based on the outcome of field interviews about the custom of funerary processions (in which the corpse is carried on a bier) conducted in 92 villages in 79 *dong* and *ri* in 45 *gu*, *eup* and *myeon* in 16 cities and counties in southern Gyeonggi Province.³ These interviews were not, in fact, held for the purpose of investigating questions of funerary

¹ Terms used to denote people in this group differ according to time, place, the characteristics of the speaker and the context in which she is speaking. Examples include *sangnom*, *sangmin*, *sangsaram*, *sangin*, *hain*, *araetgeot*, *araenmul*, *araetchi*, *araetsaram* and *jungin*. Here, I will leave terms used in direct quotes unaltered, while using *araetgeot*, which I believe to be the broadest concept, in my own writing. (Translator’s note: *Araetgeot* literally means “thing below” or “underling,” I have translated it as “inferior.”)

² (Translator’s note) Aristocrat.

³ Data was collected during field interviews conducted between 2001 and 2014, especially in the first five and last three years of this period. The full list of interview locations is included in Table 1. The unabridged Korean original also includes informants’ names, genders, years of birth, and places of residence as well as the dates of interviews.

processions; rather, the material used here comes from answers to supplementary questions that were asked to gain an overall understanding of villages as part of a field study focusing mainly on agricultural issues. I asked these questions in the belief that they would help provide an understanding of the characteristics of and changes in each village. Death rituals are accorded high significance in all eras and places, but holding a proper funeral is regarded as particularly important in Korean culture. Such events naturally require the work of many people, yet the *yangban* class in former times avoided carrying biers, regarding such activity as taboo. The problem of who to entrust, in a gradually equalizing society, with a task formerly given to "inferiors" became a social dilemma that clearly revealed the characteristics of each village. This question is so important that one previous researcher even wrote (though it is a somewhat extreme argument), "Most village organizations formed since the second half of the twentieth century were formed for the purpose of conducting funeral rites" (O Changhyeon 2008: 107).

Today, when we imagine or represent the village communities that existed in traditional societies, or that exist somewhere in contemporary society, one expression frequently used is, "We are neighbor-cousins (*iutsachon*), living together as a family and sharing in each other's affairs, be they big or small, good or bad." If this idea is taken not as a self-evident statement but a sort of ideological edifice, it may be described as a kinship imagination of the community. Let us provisionally define this as a perception of the community as kinship group and the thinking and practices meant to make it actually play this role. For some 400 years, Korea was home to flourishing clan villages in all areas, to an extent rarely found anywhere else in the world; they were fueled by the expansion of clan families, a powerful type of patrilineal kinship group. Even in non-clan villages, platitudes such as "neighbor-cousin" were frequently used in an attempt to enforce social integration and the practice of helping others. Though kinship imagination of communities is by no means limited to Korea, Korean society can be seen as a particularly easy environment for communities to become erroneously analogized or associated with kinship.

One result of this is the tendency for most studies of Korean villages to take clan villages as their subject. According to one estimate, however, the number of clan villages stood at approximately 15,000 in 1935, accounting for only about one fifth of all villages (Miyajima 1996: 193–194). Clan villages are clearly an important cultural phenomenon in Korean society,

but focusing on these villages alone inevitably creates bias.⁴ Furthermore, even studies of non-clan villages, in which several different kin groups live together, have frequently settled for investigating just a few *yangban* families in *yangban* villages or illustrious native families passing themselves off as *yangban* in commoner villages, rather than surveying the entirety of family and kinship relations throughout the village in question.

Illustrious families in non-clan villages are often intertwined through marriage, a tendency that reinforces kinship imagination of village communities both in academia and in the field. It can be said that this has functioned as a pretext for excluding non-clan members in clan villages and minorities or newcomers in non-clan villages from such conceptions (as a kind of territorial attitude that is not manifested or even intended).

This appears to have been reflected again in dictionary definitions, controlling our ideas and pushing our perceptions of tradition in a certain direction. The *Encyclopedia of Korean Culture*, for example, contains the following description of rural village communities: “*local groups taking the family as their archetype*, cooperative organizations for production... comprehensive mutual help... clearly defined geographical boundaries... strong group consciousness... strict Confucian norms compelling status-based hierarchy or conventional order... developed various systems and cultures emphasizing cooperation” (author’s emphasis). Such conceptions leave no place for inferiors who would never have been regarded as members of the family. Yet the Confucian norms and the systems and culture emphasizing cooperation could hardly have been established without the roles played by those inferiors. This is why our understanding of the village community requires new, alternative theorization. The starting questions in this regard are: Why did we come to need such kinship imagination of the village community? Beyond such imaginings, were the society and communities that existed in the realm of tradition really such family-like places?

2. Background

Hiroshi Miyajima (1996) has argued that the “*yangban*-ization of Korean

⁴ For brief reviews of the way anthropological studies of Korean culture have been skewed towards clan villages and tended to emphasize long-term stability and unity, see An Seungtaek (2008) and An Seungtaek and Yi Gyeongmuk (2015).

society as a whole," which began in earnest in the nineteenth century, actually gathered speed in the modern era. According to this argument, although the modern age is one from which *yangban* have disappeared, it is, in another sense, an age in which everyone has come to act like a *yangban*. Acting like a *yangban* is a status-based (or class-based) phenomenon that cannot exist without a supporting substructure formed of non-*yangban*. Besides, if this *yangban*-ization includes ideas or even actions not just at an individual level but at a group level, such as that of the village community, it is necessary to identify the substructure of the village community that has supported the *yangban*-ization of all members in modern times, after the slaves of *yangban* families disappeared. If, for example, those seeking to act like *yangban* in modern times want to have a funeral procession, they must need not only a bier but people to carry it, too.

This mobilization of the legacy of the *yangban*-commoner relationship in modern times in order to maintain "*yangban*-style" funerary culture has made sporadic appearances in anthropological, historical, and sociological documents. Some reports, for example, claim that the practice of making commoners carry ritual offerings during ancestral rites or bear palanquins and biers at weddings and funerals continued until after liberation (Goldberg 1973: 163–164; Jo Gyeongman 1987: 122). In some villages, it was not until the late 1960s that ex-*yangban* and ex-commoners carried funeral biers together, without discrimination (Choe Jaeseok 1975: 540; Kim Junhyeong and Jeong Jinsang 2000: 248–249). In one village, at the time of fieldwork conducted in the late 1970s, former *yangban* families carried their own biers while excluding former commoners from their bier-bearing organization in order to avoid carrying the latter's biers with their own hands (Jo Ongna 1981: 85–86). Even in the early 1980s, *yangban*-commoner discrimination was a core source of conflict in village life, proving particularly inflammatory in linguistic practice (Wang Hanseok 1984: 65, 70). Into the late 1980s, there were still some villages in which *yangban* avoided sharing communal labor with commoners, instead deploying farmhands or using paid workers (Bak Seongyong 1991: 76–77). Even villages that had, since the late Japanese colonial period, tried to have their young people carry biers, based on modern education and social order, initially excluded commoners and formed groups comprising only young *yangban* (Yi Yonggi 2003).

Jeong Seungmo (2002) was the first to go beyond fragmentary mentions and analyze in earnest the issue of changes in personnel conducting funerary

processions—known by a variety of terms but most commonly as *sangdugun*. According to Jeong, the *sang* (upper) and *ha* (lower) *gye*⁵ system, under which the task of carrying of biers was given to members of *ha gye*, gradually began collapsing from the second half of the nineteenth century, with its decisive end coming in the aftermath of liberation. The *yuhak* (Confucian scholars') *gye*, a kind of bier-carrying organization (*sangyeo gye*) that generally appeared in eastern and northern parts of Gyeonggi Province, was a countermeasure aimed at making *yangban* and commoners continue the practice of carrying biers separately. Jeong also asserted that in southern Gyeonggi, this creation of two separate *gye* for two respective status groups was one of three strategies developed in response to the changing status order; the other two were the practice of engaging former lower *gye* members in exchange for payment, and employing professional *sangdugun* from cities, such as Suwon. Jeong also presented a framework to explain how these separate *yangban* and commoner funeral organizations later united as communal *gye*. While shedding light on the relationship between the legacy of the caste system and funerary folk customs, he persuasively illustrated how caste and class contradictions—the main impetus for structural transformation—were manifested through temporal delays and regional and hierarchical variations. By contrast, his analysis has remained somewhat rudimentary, especially with regard to two questions. Firstly, how could individuals subject to status-based contempt still exist and work in a modern rural village society in which the caste system has already ceased to exist (completely in terms of the law and partially in terms of customs)? And, secondly, how can we understand cases not conforming to Jeong's sequential, stage-based explanation, in which separate *yangban* and commoner funerary organizations became integrated into communal *gye*?

Addressing these points, O Changhyeon (2008) compared villages dominated by absentee landowners to those dominated by village-dwelling (local) landowners, tracing the changes caused by farmland reforms to cooperative labor and funerary practices. According to O, villages with dominant absentee landowners were reorganized into villages of small

5 (Translator's note) Private mutual aid communities with a long history in Korea. *Gye* defy simple definition due to their obscure origins, diverse types, and complex functions. Though many different assertions exist, they are generally in agreement that *gye* are created and operated in accordance with set rules with the aim of promoting mutual aid, friendship, unity, and common profit among their members (see Choe Jaeseok 1995).

landholders through the farmland reforms, so cooperative labor organizations that had been revived after liberation died out again, while funerary practices based on *yangban*-commoner relationships also disappeared from ceremonial organizations. In villages with local landowners, by contrast, landowner families and clans held on to large amounts of land even after the reforms, so labor cooperatives were maintained until around 1980, and funerary customs retained forms reflecting the *yangban*-commoner relationship until around the same time. This offers an important explanation regarding the first question above. O also asserts that the extinction of the *yangban* culture caused by farmland reforms actually brought a distinct strengthening of Confucian culture, leading to the creation of “cultural people” based on “Confucian culture.” Though highly interesting, this argument could potentially lead to an unduly optimistic understanding of the economic situation in villages in which farmland reforms produced communities of small landholders. Here, I aim to address this shortcoming.

Recently, Bae Yeongdong (2018) posited a theoretical framework whereby concurrent preservation and deconstruction of the legacy of the caste system also led to a change in folk culture, as former lower-class villagers—who had been responsible for activities such as cooperative labor, bier carrying, and folk games—left villages and had their places filled by other low-status individuals.⁶ Consequently, the frequently heard statement that the New Village Movement led to the extinction of folk rituals may be based on a substructural collapse, as newly arrived lower-class villagers left villages again, or on the reluctance of upper classes to take over lower-class culture. Particularly interesting is the case presented by Bae in which separate upper- and lower-class *sangyeo gye* never succeeded in integrating and were only disbanded following the emergence of professional undertakers. This case has a bearing on the second question above. Given that Bae’s account involves only one case of a funerary organization, I intend to supplement it

⁶ Bae Yeongdong has described how land redistributed from a local landowner through farmland reforms was located mostly outside her village, and that tenant farmers living in the village hardly benefited from the reforms at all, leaving abundant incentives for the landowner to quickly attract a new lower class to her village, even when the existing one had moved away. This can be seen as explaining from the stance of a single landowner, the situation described by O Changhyeon (2008) in his comparison of two villages. Though the two studies differ, in that O emphasizes structural continuity and Bae the replacement of humans, they share the view that villages with local landowners, unlike those with absentee landowners, were able to keep their lower classes in a state of subordination even after liberation.

here by examining the issue in the wider context of southern Gyeonggi Province. I will also continue his argument that individuals who cannot really be described as inner members of the community—namely, wage-laboring migrants who entered villages at some point in their lives and later ended up leaving again—were of crucial importance in communal village customs led by original residents who styled themselves *yangban*.

Regarding the non-other others existing in this liminal zone, Alphonso Lingis (2013: 21–160) distinguishes between rational communities and other communities that (epistemically) oppose each other while (existentially) coexisting, pointing out that rational communities are preceded by a process of others coming into contact. Accordingly, rational communities produce shared discourses, and shared discourses produce rational communities; these rational communities deem what they came to understand about the physical environment in the course of entering it (i.e., the very reason why they were established) as the consequence of their existence. But at the base of such a rational community, with its overturned causal relationships, is one made up of people who bring the community into existence yet cannot be understood or expressed in its language and have nothing in common with the rational community, other than the fact that they will all die one day—namely, the other community. Here, others are the mysterious shadows that seep away into the ground before rational communities reveal themselves in the light. They are beings who enable communicable forms to exist, like a background of white noise.

Similarly, Esposito (2011: 145–153) argues that the symbolic criteria sustaining communities exist not at their center but at their peripheries, forming a community boundary. The boundaries of a community, though distinct from its inside, do not count as its outside either; they are formed like the skin of a body (vulnerable to infiltration from the outside but also playing a defensive role), becoming an organ that affirms the body as a single entity and allows it to sense itself. When we take notice of the skin, the community is a kind of immune system or immunity, and the skin is a place and mechanism that functions by identifying others, excluding threats, and protecting the inside. By comparison, the self-definitions created by the community to determine who it is—namely, the governing principles of the inside or, in Lingis's terms, the rational community—are merely things that are, in reality, neither shared by all members nor, ultimately, observed.

Therefore, in the composition of an embodied community, the feeling

of self-sensation by the skin—as a protective barrier that wraps the body and is both part of it yet is neither on the inside nor the outside—clearly comes before and regulates any self-awareness by the brain, and it precedes, or at least occurs at the same time as, anything to do with internal tissue or systems of circulation. In other words, the body can only exist when it has skin; without it, it cannot exist, feel, or (of course) perceive (An Seungtaek and Yi Gyeongmuk 2015: 406). Ultimately, what allows us to be a member of a community is not the fact that we share something with people who are the same as us but the fact that we are surrounded by others (neither inside nor outside, neither ourselves nor enemies) who are not, cannot, and must not be the same as us. The ways in which we are the same and the things we have in common are things we discover *ex post facto* or as a consequence, and they are not even that important (given that they ought to be discovered sometime, somewhere). As long as others, whoever they are, exist around us, we can be members of a community. But if they disappear, our community rapidly starts to falter and fall into crisis.

3. The Case of *Sachon Gye*

During field interviews, when I asked about village funeral processions, interviewees often claimed that “the whole village used to carry [the bier] until not long ago,” giving long-winded explanations about how their village was a place where everyone helped each other with all affairs, big or small, happy or sad. I cannot say that these comments were lies or exaggerations. There were, indeed, many cases in which the whole village, or its younger residents, took part in funeral processions in a truly communal fashion. *Sachon* (cousin) *gye*—found in practically every village in areas of southern Gyeonggi Province, such as Hwaseong and Yongin—can be called a typical example of such reciprocal and communal funeral procession organizations. One interesting aspect of *sachon gye* was that interviewees in every village explained their purpose in exactly the same way, as if reading from a set text. For example, in Deongmeoru, an Andong Gwon clan village in the countryside in northern Hwaseong, the *sachon gye* was formed in 1948, “with the purpose of looking after each other’s [deceased] parents, carrying [the bier] together as a form of communal labor.” Since then, “nephews” have carried biers together. In Jugok 2-ri, a Cheongju Han clan village in coastal Hwaseong, they gave exactly the same explanation as that of

Deongmeoru: “The purpose of forming the *sachon gye* back then was, ‘If your father dies, we go and carry [the bier], and if our father dies, you come and carry it.’” In Seollyanggae, a country village in southern Hwaseong, a *sachon gye* was finally created in the late 1980s, “for neighbor-cousins to organize to carry biers and hold funerals.” The people of Beolmoru, in Uiwang, also explained that following liberation, “you had to join [the *gye*], otherwise you’d be ostracized. A *sachon gye* is about cooperating in everything, good or bad.”

As long as there are people to remember and documents to record such cases, they are effectively countless. Though many such *sachon gye* were formed in the aftermath of liberation, some appeared as early as the end of the Daehan Empire or the Japanese colonial period, or as late as the 1970s, 1980s, and even 1990s. Despite local variety and differences in timing, and despite the fact that there is no way all the *gye* could be following some kind of common manual, it is clear that they share some kind of logic. *Sachon gye* are organized among “neighbor-cousins” for communal bier carrying, based on the belief that the village is a place of cooperation where all villagers share in each other’s affairs, big or small, happy or sad.

More interesting, however, is that villagers absolutely did not hold funerals as a cooperative community of neighbor-cousins, sharing affairs big and small, before *sachon gye* were formed. In Seollyanggae, Hwaseong, a village already mentioned above, one interviewee commented, “Before, servants did that kind of thing, but we made [the *sachon gye*] because there’s no difference between *yangban* and commoners nowadays.” In Deongmeoru, in Hwaseong, too, it was known that the Gwon family had not carried biers before the formation of *sachon gye*, and they called in people from a neighboring village or paid laborers from Suwon. In Poil-dong, Uiwang, a tradition of communal bier carrying by the whole village existed even before the formation of the *sachon gye*. But the people of Neungan, a clan village in neighboring Naeson-dong that is home to the head family descended from Grand Prince Imyeong of the Jeonju Yi clan, did not carry biers because they were *yangban*. Because of this, the people of Poil-dong regarded those of Neungan with cynicism, saying, “Over there, even people who go around digging for wild herbs and catching snakes still won’t carry a bier.”

Countless such cases existed. In Seocheon 2-ri, in Yongin, families in the village formed a *sachon gye* that was not joined by the *yangban* Sangju Hwang family. Even in 2003, when interviews were conducted, the Hwang

family were part of the *sang gye*, an organization for mutual aid including material commodities (objects or money), but not the *sachon gye*, a bier-carrying organization in which members carried biers side by side, on an equal basis. When the Hwangs had a death in the family, they paid workers from Suwon to carry the bier. They said that the *sachon gye* was "something only the Kims and the Baks did," and that they had not joined it because they were *yangban*. When asked why they had joined the *sang gye*, they said, "Because we do drop by [at the bereaved household]."⁷ Effectively, the Hwangs were admitting that they stopped by at the households of other bereaved villagers and had only been avoiding carrying their biers. The case in Janganmal, Uiwang, was similar. After liberation, *sachon gye* for communal bier carrying were formed in other parts of the area, with no *yangban*-commoner distinction, but not in Janganmal, a Pyeongsan Shin clan village. The reason given was, "We [*yangban*] can't go and carry their [commoners'] biers."

Meanwhile, behind such similarities lay differences in explanations as to what kind of people formed *sachon gye*. While some said that they were created by *yangban*, with commoners excluded, others explained that they were formed by commoners and not *yangban*. For example, in Jugok 2-ri, Hwaseong, the Cheongju Han clan village mentioned above, the *sachon gye* was formed "because there were no more plebs and no more laborers to hire [...]. Since we still look down on plebs [...], at first, the *sachon gye*, too, only had *yangban* in it." This is the same as the initial situation in the village in Janghowon, Icheon, studied by Yi Yonggi (2003).

By contrast, in Gungpyeong 2-ri in Hwaseong, a village of the local *yangban* Chogye Jeong family, a *chinmok gye* was formed in the 1960s, in which residents began carrying biers together. When I asked one resident, a member of the Chogye Jeong clan, why the *chinmok gye* had not been called a *sachon gye*, they answered, "*Sachon gye* doesn't sound good. A *sachon gye* is made up of plebs. In villages where they have *sachon gye*, *yangban* have no way of carrying the bier; the plebs make a *sachon gye* for carrying it and the *yangban* don't join [...]. The kind of place where a *sachon gye* forms is a village made up of various half-brothers, where there's no single-family group. Even a *yangban* becomes a pleb if he joins the *sachon gye*, so you're

⁷ As fellow villagers, regardless of their former status, the Hwangs would be expected to visit the homes of bereaved families and offer condolences and some form of material or monetary gift. As such, belonging to a mutual aid organization like the *sang gye* was advantageous.

not a *yangban* if you join.” This explanation goes directly against that offered in Jugok-ri but describes the same situation as Seocheon 2-ri in Yongin and Janganmal in Uiwang, as seen above.

It can therefore be said that, with regard to the legacy of the *yangban*-commoner relationship, *sachon gye* were formed in three types: 1. for the whole village to carry biers together, with no distinction between *yangban* and commoner; 2. for commoners to carry each other’s biers together, in the absence of *yangban* who refused to carry the biers of commoners; and 3. for *yangban* who did not want to carry the biers of commoners, to carry their own biers in the absence of commoners. As Jeong Seungmo (2002) explains, types 2 and 3 are often integrated into type 1, but as Bae Yeongdong (2018) explains, in a different vein—and as in the examples of Seocheon 2-ri in Yongin and Janganmal in Uiwang, above—there are also cases in which villages have reached the contemporary era without achieving such integration.

4. The View in Southern Gyeonggi Province

Based on our understanding of the development of *sachon gye* and the ideals behind them, let us now expand our scope to include villages that formed bier-carrying *gye* under different names. The table below offers a brief summary of the situations in southern Gyeonggi villages where my interviews were conducted, with regard to changing funerary procession practices before and after liberation. Here, the term “communal procession” denotes cases in which all members of a village carry biers together, with no distinction between *yangban* and commoners.

A summary of the development of communal processions, as arranged in the table for an overview, is as follows. First, in most cases, communal processions began in earnest after liberation; villages that started resolving the issue before liberation are in the minority. Of the 75 villages for which a specific or approximate date for the beginning of communal processions could be confirmed, 33 did so before liberation,⁸ 27 shortly after liberation,

⁸ Here, villages recorded as having begun communal funerary processions before liberation include both those for which precise evidence exists and those in which residents who were aged 10 or older in 1945 made comments such as, “We always used to carry the bier with no distinction between *yangban* and commoners,” or “They say they used to distinguish between *yangban* and commoners, but we never saw that.”

Table 1. The development of funerary procession practices in southern Gyeonggi Province.

Case no.	Si / gun	Gu / eup / myeon	Dong / ri	Village	Communal processions			Notes
					Previous bier carriers	Commencement date	Organization in charge	
1	Icheon	Sindun	Namjeong	Namjeonggol	<i>Jungin</i> , commoners	Before liberation		Biers carried by <i>jungin</i>
2		Bubal	Sanchon	Sanchon	Servants, people from other villages	Shortly after liberation	Cheongnyeon hoe	“Servants” also farm independently
3			Sinha	Bokhae	(Non- <i>yangban</i>)	Shortly after liberation	Sangjo hoe	Some “ <i>yangban</i> ” refuse to take part
4		(city center)	Jeungil	Jeungil	Community (partial)	Shortly after liberation	Yeonban gye	Some “ <i>yangban</i> ” refuse to take part
5			Jilli	Jinmal	Community	Before liberation		Illustrious families don’t carry their own biers.
6	Gwangju	(city center)	Sam	Batgajul	-	Shortly after liberation	Chimnok hoe	Situation before liberation unknown
7		Namjong	Bunwon	-	Community	Before liberation		No “ <i>yangban</i> ” refuse to take part
8		Sinchon	Sindae	Saeteomal	Community	Before liberation		Clans don’t carry their own biers.
9		Chowol	Ssangdong	Daesokdong	<i>Jungin</i> , people from other villages	1970s	Yeonban gye	<i>Yangban</i> and <i>jungin</i> separately after liberation
10	Hanam	(city center)	Deokpung	Bangtengi	-	Before liberation		
11	Yeosu	Neungseo	Yongun	Sinuri	Community	Before liberation		Some “ <i>yangban</i> ” refuse to take part
12		Bungnae	Ogeum	-	Community	Before liberation		Some “ <i>yangban</i> ” refuse to take part
13		(city center)	Wolsong	Sambatgol	(Non- <i>yangban</i>)	Before liberation	Sangjo hoe	“ <i>Yangban</i> ” integrated after liberation

Table 1. (continued)

Case no.	Si / gun	Gu / eup / myeon	Dong / ri	Village	Communal processions			Notes
					Previous bier carriers	Commencement date	Organization in charge	
14	Yang-pyeong	Danwol	Boryong	Hanteo			Yuhak gye	Yuhak gye integrated in 1989
15			Saneum	Gobuk		Before liberation		Bier purchased shortly after liberation
16				Sandae	(Non- <i>yangban</i>)	Before liberation		Some “ <i>yangban</i> ” refuse to take part
17		Gangha	Hanggeum	Hanggeum		Before liberation		
18	Pyeong-taek	Cheongbuk	Deogu	Wondeogu	(Non- <i>yangban</i>)	Shortly after liberation	Sang gye	
19				Suchon	(Non- <i>yangban</i>)	Shortly after liberation		
20			Okgil	Singi	Commoners	Shortly after liberation	Yeonban gye	
21	Anseong	Gosam	Daegal	Hagal	<i>Jungin</i> , people from other villages	Shortly after liberation	Sang gye	
22		Gongdo	Jungbok	Wonjungbok	Community	Before liberation		<i>Sang gye</i> formed in 1968
23		Geumgwang	Samheung	Hasokpa	(Non- <i>yangban</i>)	Shortly after liberation	Yeonban gye	Tiny minority of <i>yangban</i> refuse to take part
24		Daedeok	Mosan	Sangmosan	<i>Jungin</i> , servants	Gradual absorption	Yeonban gye	<i>Yangban</i> and <i>jungin</i> separately after liberation
25			Sonae	Naegok	Servants	Gradual migration	Yeonban gye	<i>Yangban</i> and servants separately after liberation

Table 1. (continued)

Case no.	Si / gun	Gu / eup / myeon	Dong / ri	Village	Communal processions			Notes
					Previous bier carriers	Commencement date	Organization in charge	
26		Miyang	Boche	Bocheri		Before liberation		
27		Bogae	Gokcheon	Gobeunae	Servants, farmhands	Before liberation	Sang gye	
28			Icheon	Eumdalmal	Jungin	C. 1960s	Yeonban gye	Yeonban gye formed among <i>yangban</i> only, after liberation
29		Yangseong	Nansil	Nansil	Commoners, <i>jungin</i>	Before liberation	Sang gye	Some " <i>yangban</i> " refuse to take part
30		Wongok	Chilgok	Geumgno	Servants, people from other villages	Shortly after liberation	Yeonban gye	
31	Osan	(city center)	Naesammi	Ansammi	Suwon undertaker	1990s	Sangjo hoe	
32				Geomdi	Suwon undertaker	1970s	Sangjo gye	
33		Segyo		Origol	Suwon undertaker	1950s	Communal <i>chinnok hoe</i>	
34			Sucheong	Sucheongmal	Suwon undertaker	1977	Beonyeong hoe	<i>Yangban</i> started carrying biers separately after liberation
35				Bakdong	Suwon undertaker	Shortly after Korean War	Sanggyeo gye	Biers rented from another village
36	Hwa-seong	Namyang	Jangdeok	Keunmal	Commoners	Shortly after Korean War		<i>Sangjo hoe</i> formed of members of the same clan

Table 1. (continued)

Case no.	Si / gun	Gu / eup / myeon	Dong / ri	Village	Communal processions			Notes
					Previous bier carriers	Commencement date	Organization in charge	
37		(city center)	Jangji	Unmal	Suwon undertaker	1970s	Yeonban gye	
38			Bansong	Budanggol	Suwon undertaker	Shortly after liberation	Yeonban gye	Some “yangban” refuse to take part
39			Seogu	Seollyanggae	Servants, commoners		Sangpo gye	Gradual integration: Sangpo gye → sachon gye
40				Jinguri	Servants, commoners		Sangpo gye	Gradual integration: Sangpo gye → yeonban gye
41			Osan	Omi	People from other villages			Ultimately aborted due to refusal by “yangban”
42			Jung	Saeteomal · Eumjipyeon	Commoners from other villages	1970s	Chinmok gye	Began changing after liberation
43		Bongdam	Deok	Deongmeoru	Commoners from other villages	Shortly after liberation	Sachon gye	
44		Bibong	Ssanghak	Donghakdong	Commoners, people from other villages	Shortly after liberation		Some “yangban” refuse to take part
45		Seosin	Gungpyeong		Commoners			Separate even after liberation; attempts to start communal processions consistently unsuccessful
46		Songsan	Sagang	Jeongdori		Shortly after liberation	Sang gye	

Table 1. (continued)

Case no.	Si / gun	Gu / eup / myeon	Dong / ri	Village	Communal processions			Notes
					Previous bier carriers	Commencement date	Organization in charge	
47		Ujeong	Unpyeong	Pyongbat	Jungin, commoners			Jungin also obliged to carry bier if told to do so
48			Wonan	Geomul	Commoners	Shortly after liberation		
49			Jugok	Jangjagwon · Guseul		(Before liberation)		Commoners only carry wedding palanquins
50				Ijokdari	Commoners from other villages	1960s	Sachon gye	Sachon gye formed of jungban only, after liberation
51			Hogok	Jagaseom	Commoners, people from other villages	Shortly after liberation	Sachon gye	
52		Paltran	Haechang	Changmal		Before liberation		
53	Yongin	Gihong	Nongseo	Bandal	Jungin, servants	1970s	Sangjo hoe	Joint organization with Banwol-ri in Hwseong
54			Seocheon	Annal · Gungmal	Commoners	Shortly after liberation	Sachon gye	Some “jungban” refuse to take part
55				Buldanggol	Commoners	Shortly after liberation	Sachon gye	Some “jungban” refuse to take part
56		Suji	Sinbong	Jungmal	Suwon undertaker	1990s		Constant failure; young people carry biers

Table 1. (continued)

Case no.	Si / gun	Gu / eup / myeon	Dong / ri	Village	Communal processions			Notes
					Previous bier carriers	Commencement date	Organization in charge	
57	Suwon	Gwonseon	Ceumgok	Jungchon	Suwon undertaker			Biers originally carried by commoners
58		Yeongtong	Maetan	Maltonggol		Before liberation		Some “yangban” refuse to take part
59			Yeongtong	Dwitgol	Commoners	Shortly after liberation		Some “yangban” refuse to take part
60			Ha	Sinhari	Commoners	Shortly after liberation		<i>Chinmok boe</i> formed in 1960s
61		Jangan	Sanggwanggyo	Utgwanggyo	Commoners, Suwon			Some “yangban” refuse to take part
62			Hagwanggyo	Araetgwanggyo		Before liberation		
63	Uiwang	(city center)	Gocheon	Gorumul	Commoners, people from other villages	Shortly after liberation		
64				Beolsageunae		Before liberation		Carried biers in the neighboring village
65			Naeson	Neungan	<i>Jungin</i> , people from other villages			
66			Sam	Araetjanganmal	<i>Jungin</i> , people from other villages			Communal bier carrying never began
67			Wanggok	Wangnim	Jungin			<i>Sangyo gye</i> always remained separate

Table 1. (continued)

Case no.	Si / gun	Gu / eup / myeon	Dong / ri	Village	Communal processions			Notes
					Previous bier carriers	Commencement date	Organization in charge	
68			Woram	Doryongmal	Jungin, people from other villages			Incomplete integration of <i>sang hoe</i> in 1980s
69			I	Changmal	Servants, people from other villages	1970s		<i>Yangban</i> separately, from after liberation
70				Sangagol	Jungin, people from other villages			
71			Chopyeong	Utsaoudae	Commoners	Around 1960	Sang gye	Interviewee explained categories of <i>yangban</i> and commoner
72			Poil	Beolmeoru				<i>Sachon gye</i> formed following liberation
73				Yangjipyeon		Before liberation		
74			Hagui	Uiil Bukgol	Jungin	Shortly after liberation	Sachon gye	
75				Uiil Oringgae	Jungin	Shortly after liberation	Bujo gye	
76				Hakhyeon Annal		Before liberation		
77	Gumpo (city center)		Bugok	Gorangchigi		Before liberation	Sangyeo gye	Managed by <i>cheongnyeoyun hoe</i> since 1960s
78			Sokdal	Sokdal	(Non- <i>yangban</i>)	Shortly after liberation		Separate from non- <i>yangban</i> villages

Table 1. (continued)

Case no.	Si / gun	Gu / eup / myeon (city center)	Dong / ri	Village	Communal processions			Notes
					Previous bier carriers	Commencement date	Organization in charge	
79	Siheung	(city center)		Jeongchon		Before liberation	Sangyeo gye	
80	Incheon	Namdong	Nonhyeon	Noryeom		Before liberation	Sangyeo gye	
81			Gojan	Donggil		Before liberation		
82			Namchon	Sangchon		Before liberation		
83			Seochang	Dokgul		Before liberation		
84			Susan	Balchon	Jungin			
85			Unyeon	Umsil		Before liberation		
86			Jangsu	Jangjagol		Before liberation	Sang gye	
87		Seo	Yeonhui	Saenmal	(Non- <i>yangban</i>)	Shortly after liberation		
88		Yeonsu	Ongnyeon	Okgol	Commoners	Shortly after liberation		
89				Hannaru		Shortly after liberation	Sangyeo gye	
90		Jung	Unnam	Namdi · Bangiran		Before liberation	Sangpo gye	Performed by separate villages following liberation
91	Ganghwa	Ganghwa	Gwancheong	Junggol		Before liberation		
92		Sconwon	Sconhaeng	Sulgam		Before liberation		

3 shortly after the Korean War and through the rest of the 1950s, 3 in the 1960s, 7 in the 1970s, and 2 in the 1990s. If answers dating up to and including the 1960s are classed as “after liberation and before industrialization,” namely before the onset of de-agriculturalization and rural depopulation due to industrialization, 33 villages began communal processions before liberation and in the period between liberation and industrialization. When cases from the 1970s onwards are added, villages that began communal processions after liberation constitute a majority. Moreover, most of the communities that began the practice before liberation were either commoner villages—where no one that could be described as *yangban* lived in the first place, and thus no *yangban*-commoner distinction existed—or *yangban* villages in which *yangban* refused to take part in communal processions even after the practice had begun. This is why the postwar era must be seen as the period in which communal processions transcending *yangban*-commoner distinctions began in earnest.

Second, certain regional trends can be observed when it comes to the naming of funerary procession organizations. Excluding names commonly found all over the country, such as *sangjo gye/ho*, *chinmok gye/ho*, and *sang (po/yeo) gye*,⁹ two notable names used in southern Gyeonggi Province are the aforementioned *sachon gye* as well as *yuhak gye* (幼學契) and *yeonban gye* (延燔契). These three terms are interesting in that they are not often used to denote general mutual aid organizations for the purpose of sharing costs but normally refer to *gye* established for the purpose of bier carrying. While *yuhak gye* is often used in northern and northeastern Gyeonggi Province, *yeonban gye* is known to occur frequently in the Chungcheong region (Jeong Seungmo 2002: 140–143). The term *sachon gye* was used principally in Hwaseong and Yongin, *yuhak gye* in Yangpyeong, and *yeonban gye* in Gwangju, Icheon, Anseong, Pyeongtaek, and part of Hwaseong (in Dongtan-myeon, at the east-southeasternmost end of Hwaseong). *Sachon gye* was used prominently in central-southern Gyeonggi and *yuhak gye* primarily in north and northeastern Gyeonggi. The predominant use of *yeonban gye* in the far south of Gyeonggi is probably the result of culture

⁹ These general names, with the exception of *sangyeo gye*, are often used to denote organizations not formed for communal bier carrying but for general cost-sharing. In this table, however, I have used such names only when they apply to communal bier-carrying organizations.

shared with the adjacent Chungcheong region.¹⁰

Third, when it comes to the sociohistorical character of funerary procession organizations, two unique features can be observed in conjunction with the time when communal processions began, as mentioned in the first point above. Firstly, villages that had a separate organization in charge of communal processions generally began the practice after liberation; those that did not have a communal procession organization had been, in many cases, carrying funeral biers with no distinction between *yangban* and commoners since before liberation.¹¹ Secondly, in cases where a separate organization in charge of communal processions had been created at some point during the Japanese colonial period or after liberation, such organizations developed in similar ways, despite differences in name. In other words, such organizations fundamentally were given, and took on, similar social roles, regardless of when they were formed. Their role was to resolve the legacy of the *yangban*-commoner relationship, which had officially been abolished since the Gabo Reform but remained in rural villages even in the modern era—in other words, to create new entities for carrying biers with no distinction between *yangban* and commoners. Reconstituting these processes and their significance can further our understanding of village communities in modern Korea.

5. Villages that Attempted Communal Processions before Liberation

In this section, I examine interview material from villages that began holding communal processions before liberation, in accordance with the distinction established above. Many of these villages not only make no distinction between *yangban* and commoner but have no *yangban* group at all, and

¹⁰ I was also told that bier-carrying *gye* in the Gimpo area, which was not included in my interview locations, are called *uimu gye*. It is therefore possible that, in addition to *yubak gye* in northern and northeastern Gyeonggi, *sachon gye* in the central south of the province, and *yeonban gye* in its southernmost border regions, *uimu gye* exists as a name for bier-carrying *gye* that represents characteristics of Gyeonggi's central western region.

¹¹ Though I was unable to confirm an exact correlation, villages that made no distinction between *yangban* and commoners to start with, or that had decided before the mid-colonial period to no longer make distinctions, probably had no need to form a separate organization for communal funeral processions because they had already established a practice of having biers carried by the whole village, regardless of class.

they tend to use income from communal bier carrying not for any particular organization but for the whole village.

For example, Jinmal, in Icheon, despite its long history, is home to a mixture of families and cannot be described as a *yangban* village. As far as the villagers know, funeral biers were already being managed by a communal *gye* using communal village funds during the Japanese colonial period, with any income from bier carrying being added back to the same funds. Bangtengi, a village in Deokpung 3-dong, in Hanam, was established after the great flood of 1925 and was, thus, naturally home to no one that could be described as a *yangban*. Until the mid-1990s, an *ijung gye* (里中契), a type of village *gye*, managed village funds, and a bier belonging to the village was used in communal processions. The same is true of Hakhyeon, in Uiwang, a commoner village comprising a mixture of families that was once so poor that "all the villagers used to make a living by selling wood." Until the 1980s, the villagers carried a bier belonging to the village as a form of communal labor. Any income made from money received when the bier carriers crossed a stream or went up a hill and shouted for *nojadon*¹² was put back into the village funds. When a death occurs in Poil-dong, in Uiwang (the aforementioned village in which villagers criticized those of Neungan for not carrying biers), "a circular is sent around the village, and [everyone] cooperates, even poor people and lonely people"—a practice that began before liberation.

At that time, in fact, it was a luxury for a village to even have a bier and be able to use it for funerals. Go Yeongho, a native of Hwanghae Province, moved with his parents to Ganghwa in around 1935. After moving from Gwancheong-ri to Namsan-ri, they settled in Sinmun-ri in the early 1940s. When his father died, while the family was living in Namsan-ri, his body was carried to his grave on a "baby bier." Go explained: "A baby bier is made of wood, looks like a palanquin, and is carried by two people. They use that because at least it's better than just using a stretcher. They just cover up the body so you can't see what's on top."

Despite Go's claim that using a baby bier was better than using a stretcher, there were, of course, many cases where a stretcher was used to carry the deceased. Sanchon was supposed to be a village in which "they didn't carry biers because it was a *yangban* village; people came from other villages to

¹² (Translator's note) Money placed on a bier to help the deceased on their long journey to the afterlife.

carry them.” But the circumstances of poor people did not allow them to call in others, so they used two-person stretchers to carry the deceased at funerals. Biers and laborers to carry them were brought in from Suwon or neighboring villages for funerals held in Segyo-dong, in Osan, before the establishment of the communal *chinmok hoe* in 1956, and in Jugok-ri, in Hwaseong, from shortly after liberation until the formation of the *sachon gye* in the 1960s. Mourning families who could not afford this, however, used stretchers to carry the deceased, paying small amounts of money to employ people or using communal labor.

Having a village bier was thus a strong desire among villagers, and purchasing one was regarded as an imperative of sorts for any independent village with the requisite financial resources. Until the early Japanese colonial period, the village of Noryeom, in Incheon, was home to only seven households, inhabited by boatmen providing ferry services. But with the establishment of Sorae salt fields (1921) and Sorae Station on the Suwon-Incheon railway line (1937), the settlement saw an influx of migrants from across the country and became a village in its own right. When the village grew to number several dozen households after the building of the railway station, the people of Noryeom quickly created a *sangyeo gye*, bought a bier, and began using it at funerals. When speaking of the *sangyeo gye* that operated from liberation until the influx of refugees, villagers explained: “Almost everyone except the salt makers was in the *sangyeo gye*, so in early January, all the *gye* members would gather, slaughter a pig, cook tofu and drink *makgeolli*, and it was a village party.”

Noryeom saw a rapid influx of refugees after liberation, transforming it into a town and resulting in the dissolution of the *sangyeo gye*. By contrast, in the case of Unnam-dong, located on Yeongjong Island in the Incheon area, *sangyeo gye* were formed in each village after refugees arrived. At this time, the village of Bangiran, in Unnam-ri 4-ban, had too few households to afford a bier of its own and, therefore, formed a *sangpo gye* with neighboring Keunmal in Unseo-ri, with which it coexisted like a single village, and bought a bier together. Acquiring a bier was part of becoming a proper village, and those that could not do this alone effectively had to join forces with a neighboring village in similar circumstances.

Of course, those living in hard-up commoner villages were not unaware of the *yangban*-commoner distinctions when it came to bier carrying in *yangban* villages. When I asked, in Bangtengi, in Hanam, whether villagers with the same surname carried each other's biers, one interviewee responded,

“Names don’t matter when it comes to carrying a bier,” before adding, “Originally, *yangban* didn’t carry biers, only plebs did. When there’s no money, there are no *yangban* or commoners. But I’m not a *yangban*, so that’s all I know.”¹³ When I asked in Beolmeoru, in Uiwang, whether there was anyone in the village who wouldn’t carry a bier, one interviewee immediately began explaining that, in their village, that didn’t happen: “Having a funeral was quite a tricky thing back then. In the old days, some people took their dead and just buried them. Carrying a bier was seen as vulgar. Bier carriers were seen as ignorant, and *yangban* didn’t want to carry a bier; if there was no one else to carry it, you couldn’t have a funeral.” The reason interviewees gave self-deprecating answers about the *yangban*-commoner relationship, even when I made no mention of it, was that everyone was aware of the scale and state of the relationship when it came to bier carrying. In other words, even in places where communal processions had been established before liberation, a clear awareness existed that the task of bier carrying was generally avoided. The villagers were “nonetheless” sharing this task.

This opens the way to understanding two striking types of cases among villages that began holding communal processions before liberation. The first type of village had done so despite being home to extreme *yangban*-commoner discrimination; almost without exception, this led to criticism of villagers who did not observe the new norm. This confirms that even in places where communal processions had become established as the norm throughout the village before liberation, it was not easy to ensure that the norm was observed; there remained people who asserted *yangban* status and attempted not to comply. Individuals in the village who avoid carrying biers “on the grounds that they are *yangban*” are, of course, threatened by the communal decision that they should carry them “despite being *yangban*.” However, this recalls the existence of other villages where people do not carry biers on the grounds that they are *yangban*, and can thus be said to have played a role in affirming the communal decision to make villagers carry biers “despite being *yangban*,” and the group communal character that results from this decision.

¹³ In a clan village, claiming that members of the same family did not carry biers effectively meant exemption from nearly all bier-carrying obligations. This pretext therefore tended to be used by those trying to avoid carrying biers, while those trying to force bier carrying tended to restrict their use of it. For further details, see Jeong Seungmo (2002: 147).

Another form of answer is that in which interviewees assert a clear sense of pride that their village is an “enlightened place.” Various explanations were offered as to the background against which such villages became “enlightened first”: its development had been led by those in technical professions; the village was close to a big city, and everyone living there had been a commoner; or the village had been one of the first to receive modern education or Protestant Christianity. What united all these answers were the expressions of pride that accompanied explanations of how the village carried its biers communally. Conversely, this pride could also be seen as an indication of the strength of social perceptions that communal bier carrying was something not to boast about.

Seen from this perspective, the sociohistorical status overlaid with pride that “this has always been an enlightened place” is not essentially that different from the perspective overlaid with the self-deprecating comment, “I wasn’t a *yangban* to start with.” Those giving such answers were clearly aware that they had existed on the periphery of Korea’s dominant culture at the time; this peripheral position functioned as a source of great pressure on them, and it must be noted that, as a result, they lived under the threat of unjust treatment. This fact seems to have demanded that they take pride in their uniqueness as a way of blocking any real or anticipated scorn towards them within the village.

6. Villages that Attempted Communal Processions after Liberation

In this section, I examine cases where communal processions were attempted (with or without success) after liberation, and those where they were not even attempted. I focus in particular on villages that followed a path of separation between *yangban* and commoners from the late-nineteenth century and into the twentieth, before adopting communal processions at the time of farmland reforms following liberation, or took a path of employing others to carry their bier. We have already determined a framework for understanding this issue, as provided by previous research. Little further explanation is thus required, and it will suffice to expand our understanding by fleshing out the existing comprehensive skeleton with a few actual cases from southern Gyeonggi Province. Given the aims of this article, however, the flesh may prove to be more important than the skeleton itself.

In this regard, we may start from the fact that discriminatory consciousness did not completely disappear after liberation, even in villages that began holding communal processions with no discrimination between *yangban* and commoners at some point after liberation. In Yeonhui-dong, in Incheon, members of the commoner Yeongam Yi clan, who were said to have lived in the village *en masse*, would carry the bier at funerals of members of the *yangban* Chogye Jeong clan without being paid. In order to escape the stigma of commoner status, the Yeongam Yi clan got itself transferred into the family register of the XX *yangban* clan of Gimpo in the mid-Japanese colonial period; after that, they went by the name of their adopted clan. One villager commented, "Even though they had already bought the XX family register, they still used to [carry biers] like that. Now [at the time of the interview] they act like *yangban*, but everyone knows, even if they don't say anything. How could anyone actually think of them as *yangban*?"

In the same way, Goldberg (1973: 164) recorded how "at the last parliamentary election lots of people considered one candidate to be unqualified because he was of *jungin*, not *yangban*, status." This echoes the plight of the "former Yeongam Yi clan" of Yeonhui-dong, which produced descendants who became wealthy in modern times and, after buying the family register of a *yangban* clan in the Japanese colonial period, went on to become the dominant family in the Yeonhui-dong area, yet is effectively still looked down upon. In Doryongmal, in Uiwang, workers were brought in from Suwon to carry biers until the 1980s, whereupon a *sangjo hoe* was created and communal processions began. Before liberation, *jungin* from in and outside the village used to gather and carry *yangban* biers. One resident stated, "The *jungin* were all close to each other and used to come together.... Even now, you can't say that absolutely everyone has stopped treating *jungin* like *jungin*."

This kind of disdain, sustained even after the beginning of communal processions, is primarily due to memories of former disdain for the status and behavior of *jungin*. In Gorumul, in Uiwang, paid workers were brought in from Suwon or locals summoned to carry biers before communal processions began, shortly after liberation. These bier-carriers were described as "people with low-class surnames... people who pulled cows around, smacking their rumps and shouting foul-mouthed things at them like, 'come here, motherfucker.'" At that time, "plebs were people who came to funerals in order to make money and share it among themselves"; "they lived here and there, in every village, and would contact each other" in

order to go to funerals and would gather there “and work hard, even in farming season, since they could earn several times more carrying a bier than by selling their labor [on farms].” These inferiors went to any house that wanted a dog or a chicken killed and slaughtered it, then they left with the dog or chicken’s head, tail, and ankles when their work was done. According to one interviewee, “When I was young, *yangban* didn’t slaughter dogs, cows, or pigs. When they [plebs] killed a dog, they would take away a dog head, and when they killed a pig, they would take away a pig head. *Yangban* never got to eat pig heads.” These comments were all made in villages that started holding communal processions after liberation.

Such perceptions extend to subsequent generations through the concept of blood ties. In Anseong, one interviewee commented of hereditary slaves that used to live in their household, “Well, it was a bit tricky when it came to them. Later on, we [granted them independence and] sent them to live in Suwon, but it didn’t work.... That’s why they say, ‘If you bury a white dog’s tail and then dig it up again three years later, it’s still a white dog’s tail.’... They lived off other people. In the past we would even build houses for them. They’ve died, and now only their son is left. When his mum and dad, who had been hereditary slaves, died, we didn’t bow down even when we went to their funerals.” The contempt for these people endured even after their deaths. Horrifying though it is, comparing them to a “white dog’s tail” also shows an inner aspect of the modern Korean society in which we live.

Accordingly, while these people sometimes left the rural villages (where class discrimination remained customary) at some point in the modern era, some remained, enduring it, even after liberation. This may have been because the problem was not one that could be solved by leaving, but it remained a problem nonetheless. In Sangmosan, Anseong, for example, former *yangban* formed a *yeonban gye* among themselves shortly after liberation, then they gradually opened membership to the children of former *jungin* and servants. According to one resident, “Back then, there were *yangban* and commoners. When there was a funeral, you were supposed to leave everything to the commoners to do, but after the enlightenment period,¹⁴ the commoners left the village.... When there was a funeral, they [the commoners] made off with the money, so they said ‘let’s

¹⁴ (Translator’s note) The Korean enlightenment period is dated to the turn of the twentieth century.

do it ourselves.’ I think that’s why they made [the *yeonban gye*]. Later on, the children of *jungin* and servants also joined. The people who were a bit smarter thought to themselves, ‘There’s no reason to live in this neighborhood, being scorned, any more. Even if that kind of thing has mostly disappeared, it still feels bad.’ They went to live elsewhere. You could say the people that stayed behind weren’t so smart.... They joined the *yeonban* later on.”

Former *jungin* and servants who had remained in the village, “inferior to the inferiors who had left,” thus experienced discrimination until they joined the *yeonban gye*, or even afterwards. “When we were young, servants used to call *yangban* ‘sir.’ After I got married, they only did work for ancestral rites and no longer acted as servants.... The people who had been servants all died, and their descendants wouldn’t do it or went to live somewhere else, so nowhere had a big servant population. They had all gone somewhere else to act like *yangban*.” This explanation, from an interviewee in Geumno, in Anseong, was given in the context of those who had been looked down upon “improving their circumstances,” but it shows how former servants continued to perform work for ancestral rites even after the 1960s, and how contemptuous views towards them endured.

In fact, these circumstances applied to the descendants of *yangban* too. An interviewee in Ijeon-ri, in Anseong, explained: “It happens automatically if you have no money. You act subserviently just to make ends meet. Even *yangban* become *jungin* if they have to go and work in the fields. There were several people who lived that way, under the control of rich people.” In Oringgae, in Uiwang, some people performed the hard jobs of the village then left when they had saved up enough money to do so; these people were referred to as *jungin* and were described as follows: “Those *jungin* were called ‘poor descendants,’ ... (which means) that hard-up people don’t live like *yangban*, and that *yangban* act like servants when they’re hard up.”¹⁵

¹⁵ Goldberg (1973: 165) writes, “There is a phenomenon whereby individuals become plebs by leaving their hometowns and acting like plebs,” so that “I wonder if many so-called ‘plebs’ were originally *yangban*.” When combined with Bae Yeongdong (2018)’s observation above, it seems likely that a large number of those known as *jungin* belonged in this category. I will leave the phenomenon whereby the *jungin* category actually expanded in modern and contemporary times for a separate study. Our immediate understanding may be helped by referring to Wang Hanseok (2016: 149–150)’s account of a field study conducted in Hongseong, South Chungcheong Province: “In the past, this village was divided into three social classes: *yangban*, pleb,

Consequently, contemptuous views of inferiors were created not just by blood ties but according to what people actually did. This explains why job-based discrimination in accordance with *yangban*-commoner discrimination remained even after the latter had officially disappeared. In other words, even after communal processions (where everyone helped with everyone else's affairs) were introduced, sometime after liberation, this did not become possible because such tasks became desirable or honorable, or even because they were no longer seen as negative, despite being tough. Rather, it happened *despite* people wanting to avoid such tasks as far as possible because they had formerly been performed by unsavory, vulgar people.

Even after 1960, the Chogye Jeong clan members carried their own biers and they didn't use people [plebs]; and we didn't carry their biers either. The reason that system came about is that development kept going on and people started disliking the word "pleb." At one point, [former plebs] went to a Chogye Jeong funeral and said, "We'll carry the bier one last time. After that, don't ever call us when you have a funeral again." It wasn't as if tenant farming was still going on, and there was no one to say anything about it, so they said, "Ok, that's it, we'll carry our own biers too from now on." The last time those people carried a bier was just after the ceasefire, when my father died. I was in the army at the time, so I couldn't even go to his funeral.... I came out (upon being discharged) in about 1958 and heard what had happened, and from then on, the Chogye Jeong clan members carried their own biers. A few people (from other families) said they would carry biers, but they (the Jeong family) didn't let them. "You say you're not going to carry it again, so we don't need you. And we need to wake up too." Then the plebs all left. All the other families here now, they came after liberation. They were accepted into the *chinmok hoe* and they carry biers together.

Members of the Indong Jang clan didn't carry biers here. When villagers talk about who used to be a *yangban*, that kind of thing comes up, but you can't have a *chinmok hoe* as long as that stuff remains. We tried to make a *gye*, but it didn't work. It was in the mid-1950s when we tried to get a *daedong gye* together, but the reason it didn't work was, number one, because of our son-in-law's family, the Jangs. They said they wouldn't carry a bier. Could it work if an important family like that didn't join? No. So it didn't work. The ones who made such a fuss back then (those who objected the most) all died first. They didn't even smoke or drink, but they died first.... A few of the Baks carried the bier, but they were a minority.... So, since they (the Jangs and the Baks) didn't join, we couldn't do it.

and *jungin*. But *jungin* was also used as a kind of euphemistic expression that included both pleb and *jungin*.

This former quote is from a resident of Gungpyeong 2-ri, in Hwaseong, already mentioned several times above. This village gradually overcame the legacy of the caste system from the 1960s and now holds communal processions. And because farmland reforms have rendered former land-owners powerless, there is no power to enforce *yangban*-commoner discrimination in any case. But because communal processions were introduced after all the “former plebs” had gone away, “former *yangban*” and former plebs never ended up carrying a bier together; former *yangban* only held communal processions with the newcomers who replaced the old plebs.

The above quote discusses an aborted attempt by villagers to form a communal bier *gye* in the mid-1950s. This was a place where *yangban*-commoner distinctions were not as strict as in neighboring villages, and residents themselves emphasized that “it was a village where people have lived equally since the old days, and where anyone who arrived and unpacked their bags was considered a villager.” Nonetheless, the incident concluded in the same way as those of aforementioned Seochon 2-ri, in Yongin, and Janganmal, in Uiwang. The only difference is that the explanation given is not from a person who steadfastly refused to carry biers but one who agreed to communal processions despite being *yangban*. The assessment that “the ones who made such a fuss back then all died first” is striking. Of course, this is more an expression of a wish for communal justice, at any cost, than a claim that all such people actually have died.

Such processes can also be confirmed through documents. In Sangmosan, in Anseong—where interviewees explained that “the inferior inferiors left behind after the other inferiors had gone, joined the *yeonban* later on”—a *yeonban gye* document under the name “Sangmosan *chinmokgye*” was produced on October 5, 1950. Regarding methods of actually providing help, clauses in the document include: “a) *Gye* members to perform duties at weddings are to be chosen by rotation. b) Members whose turn it is to work may not pay others to go and work for them. . . . e) Any member who takes it upon himself to act at will and perform work outside of the *gye* fraternity will be expelled.” These rules are extremely strict, but this was still a mutual help organization for “former *yangban*.” So, prohibiting work outside the *gye* fraternity effectively meant banning help with funeral processions transcending the *yangban*-commoner distinction. In 1966, this *gye* introduced a measure lowering the minimum age of members to below 50. It was around this time that the *gye* actually began admitting “former inferiors” as members. This was the beginning of communal processions.

Was this development a process of building “a village community where we live together as neighbor-cousins, and your work is mine, be it big or small, good or bad”? Probably, yes. But getting younger villagers to do this work was also an admission of the reality that former *yangban*, in middle age and above, did avoid funerary processions. Those who had not carried the biers of inferiors during the colonial period were still refusing to do so in the mid-1960s, when they were aged 50 or older. Even in lower age groups, wealthy former *yangban* often still refused to take part in such work; when they started to come under communal pressure, they, too, left for the city or the afterlife. Rural villages from the 1970s onwards, when this pressure became inescapable, according to general descriptions seen thus far, became scenes of communal collapse. When and where, then, did village communities where everyone lived together like neighbor-cousins, sharing in all of each other’s affairs, actually exist?

7. Conclusion

Let us now consider issues related to kinship imagination of the village community, based on the discussion above. This article has traced the practice whereby Korean village communities mobilized so-called inferiors for communal funerals, even during the modern and contemporary periods. It has revealed that, both in cases where this practice had been eliminated early on, before the Japanese colonial period, and in cases where villages struggled to eliminate it after liberation, the attendant tensions and conflicts exerted continuous pressure on communities and rite-performers.

If such village communities take the family, in its dictionary-based definition as examined in the introduction to this article, as their archetype, the term here means not a kinship group but must be closer to the concept of a household that includes slaves and farmhands, even housekeepers. Only then can we see that no community can exist without the inferiors that constitute its boundaries. But, as we know, such an understanding clearly differs from kinship-based imagining of community at work around us today. If the function of a concept is to help us understand the true nature of things, this starkly exposes the limitations of the existing concept.

In light of the cases addressed in this article, if we assume a community to be a unit sharing production, daily life, rituals, and recreation, there are two ways in which these things can be achieved “together” in a communal

fashion. One is that in which the entire village community does actually do these things together; the other is that in which the entire village community together gets someone else to do them. The former, though it may appear desirable in ideological terms, is, in reality, impossible or unnecessary; in many cases, the reality is that the community together makes someone else do the work, even when its members claim, or believe, that they themselves do it together. I believe this point has now been sufficiently explained.

Based on the insights obtained while writing this article, it is not important to expose the hypocrisy, malaise, ideological fictiveness, and internal discrimination in rural communities because these are not essentially new arguments and are not as significant as they sound. More important is the fact that the communities we speak of always need someone that they can collectively order to do things. Modern and contemporary communities in non-caste-based societies, too, have searched extensively for ways to get others to perform such tasks that are not based on discriminatory principles rooted in the *yangban*-commoner relationships traced in this article. Even today, not much has changed. Is it not the case that kinship-based imagining of the village community is merely a modern means of achieving this mobilization and avoidance? It seems necessary to reiterate that pointing out the fictiveness of this imagining does not appear to achieve much.

Meanwhile, on the other side of this imagining are the lives of those that provide its physical bedrock; namely, the "inferiors." A typical image is that of those who "hurry over without even being called and readily carry the bier" at the mere news of a death in a *yangban* household. How should they be understood? I believe this has already been adequately explained, but in the circumstances of the late colonial period or following liberation, when people were starving or subsisting on basic rice and side dishes, a funeral was effectively a feast; it was perfectly rational behavior to attend, perform work, eat one's fill, and take the leftovers home, even if one was not actually paid for the work. This also can be understood as the reciprocal relationship between *yangban* and commoners. These commoners were sometimes inferiors from pre-modern times who had originally been servants and now remained in modern villages, or were sometimes modern inferiors who had moved in and taken the places of original inferiors who had left. It was contemporary inferiors, a combination of these two types, that carried the biers of former *yangban*.

My own personal experience of funerals in the Republic of Korea in the 1980s and 1990s, though these memories are not based in rural villages, are

of young people carrying the bier for bereaved social seniors, colleagues, friends, superiors, or teachers, thereby affirming that “we” were all members of a single community. I also remember clearly how, as soon as I began graduate school, organizing bearers and carrying the bier became an important “social” task and issue when a professor in the department experienced bereavement. Seen in terms of this article, our organization was a kind of *sachon gye*. *Sachon gye*, too, affirm that “we,” as a single village community, are “related as neighbor-cousins,” that we “work together,” and that we “together make young people (even calling back those who have gone to live elsewhere) carry our biers.” And this has been seen as linked to “beautiful customs” handed down from the past. It was a kinship imagination of the community.

In the rural villages and cities of the late twentieth century, why, really, has kinship-based imagining regarding funerary processions become so important? Based on this article, it is not because members of pre-modern or modern communities actually carried biers together; instead, it is because work given to others in pre-modern and modern times by a specific group, as it imagined its community in terms of kinship, must now either be commissioned of others for money or be done by members of the specific group itself, while the contemporary world imagines kinship-based communities and bemoans their destruction. How grateful we should be that we now take on such “bad work” so gladly. And from the perspective of “inferiors,” surely, they should do this work, since they are “superiors.” Happy memories of how once, at funerals, we could eat and drink as much food and alcohol (normally out of reach) as we liked, and how we could take leftovers home with us, probably helped generate this conception. I, too, clearly remember working flat-out to help people move house or carry a bier in exchange for just a meal and a drink, making such scenes perfectly plausible before or after liberation. But it must be affirmed that the substance behind the “beautiful traditional customs” that exist beyond the limits of these memories are completely different to the imaginings of our own memories.

To attempt a discussion at a more general level, the inferiors of the modern world were excluded from the interior of kinship imagination of the village community, but they inhabited a place that was not outside it either. But since each village had too few inferiors, they would gather with inferiors from neighboring villages at funerals in their own or other villages and can be said to have played an essential role in maintaining each

community. And weren't villages that attempted communal processions earlier on (mostly commoner villages) the liminal spaces around dominant villages that avoided such work, making them the “non-other others” of Korean culture as a whole, playing a role of preserving dominant villages' centrality amid tensions and pressures? This is what brought to mind the idea of the “skin of the community” when I was planning this article.

When that logic is applied here, we arrive at the argument that the core force maintaining a community is not the norms or principles that its members share but the liminal zone on its outskirts—namely, its “skin”—which does not conform exactly to these norms and principles and can neither be called inside nor outside the community. This raises questions about the way anthropologists and historians have perceived village communities until now. The formers' focus on reciprocity and rules that sustain the unity of a village and the latter's convention of understanding village communities based primarily on the documents produced by *yangban* kinship organizations (宗契) and *yangban* families (班家), stand at polar opposites to my argument. But documents, values, norms, and assets (presumed to be) shared by the community are established as opposite constructions to liminal zones and as *ex post facto* mechanisms of justification. The formation of liminal zones is an essential prerequisite for the formation of communities, and it is these zones that allow the village to keep being a village, even if the official rules of the village *gye* and the principles of reciprocity are destroyed. To borrow Lingis's expression, as mentioned in the introduction to the article, the fact is, the relationship between effect and cause appears to have been (at least partially) reversed.

The implication here is that we must ask whether theories aimed at understanding the community or attempts to create it in our era have failed to fully establish the existence and significance of this skin. This question, firstly, includes that of how we now deal with the kinds of phenomena, people, and work that we have tried to avoid, both in the past and today (such as disposing of corpses or carrying biers). How far are we, who leave these things not to bier carriers but to various paid helpers, from those who, since the nineteenth century, have got others to carry their corpses not through coercion but with money (Jeong Seungmo 2002)? This question demands that we find the skins newly forming in our era, the shadows dancing on the ground in the twenty-first century light, and the liminal zone to which we, together, get to immediately do the tasks that we do not want to perform ourselves, in exchange for meager economic

compensation. How different is the place where the phenomena, people, and work that do not formally belong in our rational communities—those that constitute the other community together with us—exist today from that of the “contemporary inferiors” addressed in this article? Is the difference really as great as we think? In this sense, I believe that modern and contemporary inferiors, as the others that define us, are living alongside us amid the same tensions and pressures as before, even if we claim they have disappeared.

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